

**NORTHERN PLAINS AREA**  
**Policy Memorandum**

<b>DATE:</b>	October 2004
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Recruitment Procedures for Cat 1 and Cat 4 Scientists Northern Plains Area
<b>NUMBER:</b>	PM-04-002
<b>EFFECTIVE DATE:</b>	October 25, 2004

**A. Purpose**

The recruitment of a scientist is one of the most crucial and expensive decisions we make in pursuing our research programs. The process of identifying and selecting a scientist deserves as much thought and care as that given to selecting research objectives. Over a 30-year career, investment costs for a scientist can amount to more than \$10 million. In recognition of the critical role scientists play in the ARS/NPA mission and the tremendous costs associated with recruitment and retention of scientists, the Northern Plains Area has developed this policy for recruiting Cat 1 and Cat 4 Scientists. This policy encompasses similar recruitment procedures found in industry and higher education.

It is vital that each and every search be conducted thoroughly and fairly. This policy provides selecting officials with the tools to ensure thoughtful, consistent, and comprehensive recruitment planning and procedures in order to achieve our diversity goals while at the same time ensuring quality hires.

Although this policy is designed for the recruitment of scientists, this policy can also be adapted for recruiting any position.

**B. Recruitment Procedures**

**1. *Selecting official secures approval to conduct a search –***

- The selecting official submits a SF 52 to secure approval to conduct a search. The first-line supervisor is the selecting official for SY positions. The Center Director is the selecting official for Research Leaders. The Area Director is the selecting official for Center Directors, and is the selecting official for Research Leaders where there is no Center Director.

**2. *Panel chair assigned –***

- Typically, the selecting official will serve as chair of the evaluation panel, although the designated selecting official may delegate chair duties to another senior scientist.

**3. *Contact the Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager –***

- Panel chairs are to consult with the Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager as soon as approval to begin a search is secured. The Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager will discuss with the chair underrepresentation figures, strategies on how to design and conduct a search that will target underrepresented groups, and specific recruitment procedures (KSAs, announcement, evaluation panel composition, screening, interviewing, reference checks, and record retention).

**4. Position Description (PD)** – The vacancy announcement is based on the PD, so it is important that the PD be reviewed, and revised if necessary. The Research Leader (or Center Director) drafts the position description.

- KSAs must accurately reflect the needs of the unit and position, and the specialized experience and selective factors should clearly describe what criteria are desirable.
- The Research Leader or Center Director should work closely with the HR specialist assigned to the vacancy to ensure that the PD meets criteria for the desired grade.
- The PD requires approval by the Center Director and/or Area Director and the National Program Staff.

**5. Vacancy announcement** –

- The announcement is based on the PD with accompanying KSAs, specialized experience, and selective factors, and is drafted by the panel chair in consultation with the HRD servicing representative, and with input from the Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager.
- The announcement should be sent to a variety of sources, including professional journals, professional organizations, university departments that offer degrees in the field sought, and universities that target underrepresented groups, as well as the ARS and OPM websites. The Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager should be consulted for assistance with identifying sources.
- Vacancy announcements should be advertised for at least 30 days prior to the application deadline, with longer lead times whenever feasible.

**6. Screening matrix** –

- The selecting official (or panel chair) in consultation with the Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager, develops the screening matrix, based on the PD and vacancy announcement.
- **The matrix is finalized prior to reviewing any applications.**

**7. Evaluation Panel** –

- The selecting official is responsible for compiling the evaluation panel. It is paramount that the panel be composed of individuals who are committed to hiring a diverse workforce and are willing to devote the necessary time and energy to the process.
- Additionally, where feasible, the panel should include members of underrepresented groups. To achieve a diverse panel, members from outside the immediate research unit and/or location, may be included. The Area Director and Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager are to be consulted when developing the panel; the National Program Staff may also be consulted.
- Evaluation panels should be limited to no more than seven individuals; larger panels tend to become logistically unwieldy. Recommended panel composition includes:
  - Chair (the Center Director or Research Leader, or designee)
  - One or more Unit Scientists.
  - One or more members representing customers, stakeholders, and partners.
  - A Research Leader, where feasible, from a different unit.
  - A staff member from the Unit.

**8. Screening applications** –

- HRD screening. The initial screening of applicants is performed by the HR specialist who forwards a list of certified applicants to the selecting official, who in turn forwards the certificate and applications to the panel chair. **(Note: all original application materials and the certificate must be returned to HRD following completion of the search.)**
- Copy of certificate. The panel chair provides a copy of the certificate to the Area Civil Rights Manager/EEO Specialist.

- Panel screening. The certified applicant packages are made available to the evaluation panel by the chair. The panelists rank all applicants using the matrix. The top candidates are recommended to the chair, and the chair, in consultation with the Center Director/Area Director, determines which applicant(s) to interview.
- The panel chair sends the names of the candidates selected for interview to the Area Civil Rights Manager/EEO Specialist.

#### **9. *Conduct interviews* –**

- Interviews. Each interview should be similar in length and format (research seminar, formal interview with panel), and should be of sufficient time for the candidate to meet with staff and other interested parties, and to check out the research facilities and the community.
- Checking references. The chair (or selecting official) determines when references will be checked – either before a candidate is invited for an interview or after the interview. References are supplied by the candidate and must be checked before a tentative offer is extended.
- Ranking of candidates interviewed. The evaluation panel prepares a written ranked summary narrative listing strengths and weaknesses of all candidates interviewed. This list will also serve to identify ranked alternatives in the event the top candidate withdraws from consideration or declines the offer. This written summary is submitted to the selecting official. The selecting official can either accept or reject the panel's recommendation.
  - If the recommendation is accepted by the selecting official, the name is forwarded to the Area Director for approval.
  - If the recommendation is rejected, the selecting official is expected to communicate with the panel chair and the Area Director to work out issues to reach a final decision.
  - Once the finalist is agreed on, the selecting official should review with the Area Director the offer package (salary, recruitment incentives [see Section E], start date, etc.).

### **C. The Job Offer**

**1. *Tentative offer*** – The selecting official contacts the desired candidate, by telephone, and extends a tentative offer, which is often open to negotiation between the selecting official and the candidate. Once the offer is agreed upon between the selecting official and the candidate, the selecting official submits the REE-11 along with the original certificate for the Area Director's approval.

**2. *Approval of offer*** – The Area Director and ARS Administrator must approve the tentative offer before HRD is notified. Upon approval by the Area Director and ARS Administrator, the selecting official contacts HRD to secure approval of the salary.

**3. *Official offer letter*** – The official offer letter is sent by HRD. The selecting official contacts the candidate to tell them that the official offer letter will be sent by HRD.

**4. *Maintain contact with new employee*** – The Center Director or Research Leader should take the lead in maintaining contact with the new employee and work with that employee to make the transition as seamless as possible. Assisting new employees with the transition to a new living and working environment is crucial to retention and successful job performance. Attention should also be paid to aligning new scientists with mentoring opportunities especially during the first several years of their employment with ARS.

#### **D. Record Retention**

- All panelists return any and all application materials (resumes, vitas, applications, etc.) in their possession to the chair, who in turn submits all materials to the selecting official. Original applications and the original certification are returned to HRD by the selecting official. Any copies retained by the selecting official should be destroyed after three years.
- The panel chair is responsible for sending copies of the following records to the Area EEO Specialist/Civil Rights Manager once a candidate has accepted the offer:
  1. Outreach efforts (for expanding the applicant pool, announcement sources), etc.
  2. Names of members of the selection panel, interview schedule, and core questions (not answers) asked of candidates and of references.
  3. The screening matrix, noting the ranking of each applicant.
  4. A copy of the recommendation summary of candidates interviewed.
  5. The final outcome of the search: name(s) of candidates offered the position, reason if offer was rejected; name of candidate who accepted the position, salary/grade, and incentives.

#### **E. Recruitment Incentives**

- Consult P&P 412.5 for details on the types of available recruitment incentives.
- The selecting official has the option of extending recruitment incentives, provided that location funding is available and any of the following apply:
  - Incentives are necessary to fill the position.
  - The position is difficult to fill.
  - The prospective candidate is receiving competing offers.
- Recruitment incentives should not be considered if any of the following apply:
  - There is an adequate number of qualified candidates for the position.
  - A quality candidate will join ARS without additional incentives.
  - A quality candidate will join ARS for an advanced in-step salary.

#### **F. Probationary Period**

Candidates hired for positions covered under the Research Grade Evaluation Guide will be placed in Tenure Group II (career-conditional and probationary employees), which requires a three year probationary period. Annual performance evaluations are conducted by the supervisor. It is the responsibility of the scientist to demonstrate professional competence, and it is the responsibility of the supervisor to accurately and objectively assess performance throughout this probationary period and convey to the employee any concerns relating to his/her performance. Removal of a probationary employee is not subject to grievance. Typically the first opportunity for promotion occurs early in the fourth year, during the Research Position Evaluation (RPE) comprehensive review process. The first-line supervisor should explain the annual review and RPE processes in detail as soon as the new scientist begins his/her position.

#### **G. Point of Contact**

For further information, please contact the Area Civil Rights Manager/EEO Specialist at 970-492-7053.

/s/  
W.H. BLACKBURN  
Area Director  
Northern Plains Area